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Stress and Burnout in Female High School Athletic Directors

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Abstract

In the current study we examined the relationships between stress predictors, stress, and burnout in female high school athletic directors (N = 52). Significant negative correlations between stress and hardiness and between stress and number of social support providers were found. Significant positive correlations between stress and time concerns, personnel concerns, and program success (e.g., winning) subscales of the athletic directing issues scale were also found. Subjects high in hardiness and with adequate social support networks, who also reported few athletic directing issues, were likely to report minimal stress. Significant positive correlations also indicated that stress was related to the burnout dimensions of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. Based on our results we supported and extended Kelley's (1993; 1994) model of stress and burnout with a population of female athletic directors.

Stress and burnout are common in helping professions such as counseling and teaching (Maslach, 1982). Researchers have examined the relationships between stress and burnout in teacher-coach-

es, athletic trainers, and special physical education teachers (Caccese & Mayerberg, 1984; Capel, Sisley, & Desertrain, 1987; Dale & Weinberg, 1990; DePaepe, French, & Lavay, 1985; Kelley, 1994; Kelley & Gill, 1993; Pastore & Judd, 1993; Smith, 1986; Vealey, Udry, Zimmerman, & Soliday, 1992). However, little stress and burnout research examining athletic directors has been conducted (Copeland & Kirsch, 1995; Hartman, 1981; Martin, Kelley, & Eklund, in press). Additionally, because limited research has focused on females it is not clear if female athletic directors, similar to female coaches and teachers, suffer from burnout. Thus, the goal of the current study was to examine stress and burnout among female high school athletic directors.

We examined athletic directors because, similar to teachers and coaches, they work in an environment which may be stressful. Athletic directors interact with people in emotionally charged situations (e.g., coaches, parents). Extensive interpersonal interaction, coupled with emotionally charged issues, can add additional stress to an already stressful situation (Copeland & Kirsch, 1995; Maslach, 1982). It is common for athletic directors in high school to fulfill multiple roles, such as teaching or coaching in addition to athletic directing (Martin et al., in press). Role conflict and role ambiguity, associated with dual roles, have been shown to be related to burnout in high school coaches (Capel, Sisley, & Desertrain, 1987; Kelley, 1990). In brief, athletic directors work in environments and perform functions that can be stressful.

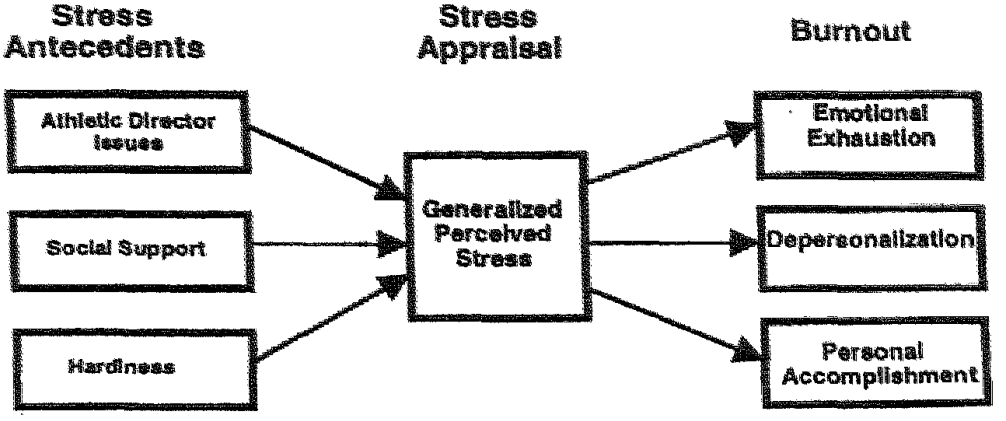
It is also important to examine stress and burnout because *both* can contribute to negative health (e.g., insomnia, weight loss) consequences (Maslach, 1982). Additionally, it has been suggested that physical education teachers suffering from burnout tend to provide less reinforcement and interact less with their students (Mancini, Wuest, Vantine, & Clark, 1984). Furthermore, stress and burnout can contribute to premature career cessation (Sparks, 1979). Presumably, stressed and burned out athletic directors may also be susceptible to the above difficulties. Finally, preliminary research with NCAA division I, II, III athletic directors found they "almost always" felt stress was evident in their careers (Copeland & Kirsch, 1995) and male high school athletic directors have also reported stress (Martin et al., in press).

To conduct the current investigation we used Kelley's (1994) model of stress and burnout to guide our research ques-

tions. Kelley's (1994) model was used because it was developed specifically for sport and physical education (see Figure 1) and has received extensive support in previous research (Kelley, 1990; Kelley, 1994; Kelley & Gill, 1993; Kelley & Eklund, in press; Martin et al., in press). We also chose to test Kelley's (1994) conceptual model of stress and burnout because its theoretical foundation is based on both Lazarus's (1990) transactional theory of stress and Smith's (1986) cognitive-affective model of burnout. With both theories there is an aknowledgment of the mediating role that cognitions play in the stress/burnout relationship. In addition to Kelley and colleague's research (1990; 1993; 1994), Vealey and colleagues (1992) have also supported Smith's (1986) cognitive-affective model.

Figure 1

Kelley's (1994) model of stress and burnout.



The present study had three purposes. First, because little information exists on female high school athletic directors, we sought to provide basic descriptive information on levels of stress predictors, stress, and burnout. Our second and third purposes were to examine the relationships between stress antecedents and stress and between stress and components of burnout. The latter two purposes were derived from Kelley's two stage model (1994). Because of a limited sample size we were unable to test Kelley's (1994) model fully through path analytic techniques as has been done previously (Kelley, 1994; Kelley & Eklund, in press; Martin et al., in press).

It is important to differentiate between stress and burnout. Stress refers to overall feelings of acute anxiety, discomfort, and frustration (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983). Lazarus (1990) suggested that people experience stress when they believe their abilities or resources are inadequate to meet the demands of a particular situation or task. For example, insufficient time and energy to accomplish important career tasks often results in stress-related feelings and thoughts. It is believed that frequent and/or intense interactions with people often lead to stress and, subsequently, burnout. According to Maslach (1982, p. 30) burnout is "a response to the chronic emotional strain of dealing extensively with other human beings." Maher (1983) defines burnout as the culmination of experiencing consistent stress and Williams and Miller (1982) viewed burnout as chronic stress. In brief, chronic stress can lead to burnout. Burnout is most frequently conceptualized as involving three related dimensions. Emotional exhaustion refers to a lack of affect such as enthusiasm. Depersonalization refers to emotional hardening and a lack of empathy. Finally, personal accomplishment reflects feelings of reduced self-satisfaction from career related tasks.

Kelley (1990; 1994), through the model, postulates a variety of social-psychological predictors of stress, which in turn, is a prediction of burnout. Kelley (1994) in a study of baseball and softball coaches, examined five predictors of stress: social support, hardiness, coaching issues, gender, and winning percentage. In the current study we examined three antecedents of stress selected from Kelley's model (1994). Hardiness and social support, are thought to buffer the effects of stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Nowacki, 1991). Hardiness is an attitude characterized by people who view problems as challenges to be faced with a sense of commitment and personal control (Nowacki, 1991). Social support encompasses both the quantity of social support available and the meaningfulness of relationships or quality of social support (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

The third stress antecedent we examined was issues specific to the career responsibilities of athletic directors because it is has been shown that career issues are contributors to stress (Kelley, 1994; Kelley & Gill, 1993; Martin et al., in press). Similar to Kelley (1994), we looked at four categories of issues unique to athletic directors' management roles. Two sets of issues include

concerns such as limited time to perform various roles (e.g., developing competition schedules) and concerns over program quality (e.g., hiring competent coaches). We also examined success of athletic programs (e.g., team's winning records) and concerns related to supervision and management of personnel (i.e., coaches, athletic trainers).

In terms of gender, we only examined female athletic directors. Finally, we did not objectively examine winning percentage because of the difficulty in quantifying each school's won/loss records, for a variety of sports, and because won/loss records are typically associated with coaches' performance, not that of high school athletic directors.

Support for examining athletic directing issues can be found in Hartman's (1981) investigation in which it was reported that college athletic directors viewed budget concerns, firing and hiring staff, building competitive programs and limited time as major sources of stress. Kelley and Gill (1993) found support for examining hardiness and social support when they found that teacher-head basketball coaches satisfied with their social support experienced lower stress and Kelley (1994) found coaches high in coaching issues and low in hardiness experienced greater stress. Based on Kelley's model and results (1993, 1994) and Hartman's (1981) study we hypothesized that number of social support providers, social support satisfaction, and hardiness would be negatively correlated with stress and athletic directors' issues would be positively correlated with stress.

Researchers have also examined the latter half of the model in which burnout can be predicted from stress and have reported that all burnout components could be predicted from teacher-head basketball coaches' perceptions of stress (Kelley & Gill, 1993). In a follow-up study, Kelley (1994) confirmed the 1993 study of baseball and softball coaches by finding that emotional exhaustion, a reduced sense of personal accomplishment, and increased depersonalization could be predicted from stress. Finally, Martin et al., (in press) in their research with male high school athletic directors, also found that stress is related to all components of burnout.

In summary, we sought to replicate and extend the work of Kelley (1993; 1994) with a population of female high school athletic directors. In addition to providing descriptive data, we exam-

ined the relationships between predictors of stress with stress and, in turn, related stress to burnout.

Method

Participants

Fifty-two female high school athletic directors from a mid-western state participated in this study. Participants ranged in age from 30 to 62 (M=44.6) and had been working as athletic directors for approximately 7 years (M=6.7).

Instruments

To ensure face validity, some items from the measure of *Burnout* (MBI Form Ed; Schwab, 1986), and *Coaching Issues Survey* (Kelley, 1990) were changed as described below. In all cases, three experts in stress and burnout research and two female athletic directors, not part of the study, collaborated on scale changes. All other scales were used as originally designed.

Demographic Questionnaire. With this questionnaire subjects were asked to report their age, ethnicity, educational background, and percentage of time spent in various roles (e.g., athletic director, teaching, coaching).

Burnout The Maslach Burnout Inventory Form Ed (MBI Form Ed; Schwab, 1986) was previously adapted for research examining burnout in collegiate teacher-coaches and collegiate coaches and athletic directors (Kelley, 1994; Kelley & Gill, 1993; Martin et al., in press). Where needed, slight adaptations in four items were made. For example, the question "I deal effectively with the problems of my student/athletes." was changed to "I deal effectively with the problems of my teachers, coaches, and student/athletes." This 22-item scale measures frequency of feelings and requires subjects to respond on a seven-point Likert-type scale with six anchored by every day and zero anchored by never. Three sub-scales assess emotional exhaustion, personal accomplishment and depersonalization. Scores range from 0 to 54 for the nine-item emotional exhaustion sub-scale. An example of one question from this subscale is "I feel burned out from my work". Scores range from 0 to 30 for the five-item depersonalization subscale and 0 to 48 for the eight-item personal accomplishment subscale. Examples of items from the depersonalization and personal accomplishment subscales are "I worry that this job is hardening me emotionally" and "I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job",

respectively. Both validity and reliability have been demonstrated in previous research (Kelley, 1994; Kelley & Gill, 1993; Martin et al., in press).

Stress. The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) is a 14-item measure of stress. For each item subjects responded on a four-point scale with four anchored by *always* and zero anchored by *never* with the total score ranging from 0 to 56. An example of one item from this scale is "How often do you deal successfully with irritating life hassles?" Reliability and validity have been documented (Cohen et al., 1983; Kelley & Gill, 1993; Martin et al., in press).

Athletic Director Issues Survey. This 30-item questionnaire was adapted from Kelley's (1990) original Coaching Issues Survey. For instance, "coach" was changed to "athletic director" for the item, "My career as a coach is interfering with family and/or social life." Subjects responded on a six-point Likert scale with five anchored by *extreme stress* and zero anchored by *no stress* and the total score ranging from 0 to 150. Validity and reliability has been demonstrated in previous research (Kelley, 1990; Kelley & Gill, 1993; Kelley & Eklund, in press; Martin et al., in press). Similar to the original scale, four subscales reflected issues specific to the following four areas. Time and Role (TR) refers to not having enough time for self, career, and family. For this eight-item subscale scores range from 0 to 40. The ten-item Won/Loss (WL) subscale targets stress associated with pressure to produce winning athletic programs with scores ranging from 0 to 50. Personnel Concerns (PC) reflects stress associated with personnel concerns such as making decisions which are not popular with coaches. Program Success (PS) is an assessement of stress related to developing quality athletic programs (e.g., budget limitations). The latter two subscales are both comprised of six items and subsequent scores can vary between 0 and 30.

Social Support. Social support was assessed with the six-item Social Support Questionnaire (SSQ6) developed by Sarason, Sarason, Shearin, and Pierce (1987). Subjects respond to six questions or areas of support (e.g., how many people can you count on to console you when you are very upset?) by noting how many people provide them with the type of support specified (maximum=nine). Subjects also rate how satisfied they are with the support they receive in each of the six areas on a six-point scale

anchored by *one* (very dissatisfied) and *six* (very satisfied). Satisfaction with support scores can range from 6 to 36. Two scores are obtained: one for the total number of supporters within one's support network and one for support satisfaction. Sarason et al. (1987), Kelley and Gill (1993), and Martin et al. (in press) have reported adequate validity and reliability.

Hardiness. Nowacki's (1990; 1991) hardiness questionnaire is a 30-item scale. For each item subjects responded on a five-point scale with five anchored by *strongly disagree* and one anchored by *strongly agree*. Total scores can range from 30 to 150. Reliability and validity have been documented (Cohen et al., 1983; Kelley & Eklund, in press; Martin et al., in press).

Procedures

Athletic directors' names and addresses were obtained from the 1995-96 Mid-Western State Athletic Directors Association Directory. All female athletic directors listed in one midwestern state (N = 70) were sent a packet of information describing the purpose of the study, human subject consent forms, all questionnaires, and self-addressed, stamped return envelopes. Follow-up letters were sent to participants who failed to respond to the first letter. The final return rate was 74% (N = 52).

Results

Internal Reliabilities

Internal consistency of items for each of the twelve multi-item scales was determined with alpha coefficients (Cronbach, 1951). All alphas were considered adequate because they met Nunnally's (1978) criteria of .70. Alpha coefficients for the stress antecedents were as follows; hardiness (.81), number of social support providers (.80), social support satisfaction (.94), total athletic directing issues score (.92), and lastly, athletic directing issues subscales: time/role (.87), won/loss (.80), program success (.75), personnel concerns (.72). The alpha coefficient for stress (.85) and burnout subscales of emotional exhaustion (.90), depersonalization (.73) and personal accomplishment (.79) were also adequate.

Descriptive data

Participants in the present study were mostly white (N = 52) female athletic directors. Description data of their demographic characteristics can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges for Subject Characteristics

Variable	M	SD	Ranges
Age (years)	44.6	8.7	30-62
Total years as AD	6.7	6.1	1-26
Years expected to continue as AD	6.4	5.7	0-21
Percentage of time spent as AD	50.6	30.8	10-100
Percentage of time spent Teaching	14.3	28.9	0-100
Percentage of time spent as AP	07.7	17.1	0-60
Percentage of time spent as Head Coach	04.1	10.8	0-44
Percentage of time spent as Dept. Head	03.9	13.2	0-50
Percentage of time spent as Head Principal	03.5	17.7	0-90
Percentage of time spent in other capacities	10.9	21.6	0-84

Note. AD = Athletic Director, AP = Assistant Principal

As shown in Table 1, athletic directors were all 30 years of age or older and had moderate (M = 6.7) levels of experience. As a group they spent half their time fulfilling their responsibilities as athletic directors with the balance of their time spent teaching, coaching, and in academic related administrative roles (e.g., assis-

tant principal). Means, standard deviations, and range of scores for all variables assessed are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations and Ranges for Predictors of Stress Antecedents, Stress Appraisal, and Burnout

Variable	M	SD	Ranges
Personal/Situational			
Stress Antecedents			
Social support			
satisfaction	4.9	1.2	1.0-6.0
Social support			
number of people	4.7	1.8	0-8.0
Athletic directing issues			
Total Score	69.6	17.3	21-105
Time/Role	21.5	6.7	3-35
Won/Loss	22.0	6.1	8-37
Program Success	13.2	4.2	1-22
Personnel Concerns	12.9	3.2	5-20
Hardiness	112.4	11.3	80-132
Stress Appraisal			
Stress	36.7	6.4	22-54
Burnout			
Emotional exhaustion	24.6	10.2	6-45
Depersonalization	7.7	5.4	0-21
Personal accomplishment	38.3	6.7	20-48

When examining the antecedents of stress we suggests that subjects were, in general, satisfied with their social support and reported an average of approximately five people providing support in each of the six areas.

They scored moderately high on the hardiness measure suggesting that, in general, these athletic directors possess a sense of personal control and commitment. Lastly, for athletic directing issues, subjects reported moderate concerns, with time/role demands appearing to be more of an issue than personnel concerns, won/loss, or program success.

Compared to Kelley's (1994) and Kelley and Eklund (in press) findings, these female athletic directors reported considerably more stress than collegiate coaches (M=36.7 vs M=27.1) and

teacher-coaches (M=36.7 vs M=28.8) although compared to the scale range (0-64) their scores suggested moderate stress. Using norms established by Maslach and Jackson (1986) participants reported levels of emotional exhaustion (M=26.4) indicative of moderate to high burnout. In contrast, their depersonalization (M=7.7) and personal accomplishment (M=38.3) scores are suggestive of low burnout.

Correlational and regression results

Correlations supporting our hypotheses can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

Correlations among Stress Antecedents and Stress

	Stress
Hardiness	-.52*
Social Support satisfaction	-.21
Social Support number of people	-.36*
Athletic Directing Issues Total Score	.47*
Subscales	
Time/Role	.53*
Won/Lose	.27
Program	.38*
Success	
Personnel	.41*
Concerns	

Note. *p < .0

Significant negative correlations between stress and hardiness, and number of social support providers were found. We found significant positive correlations between stress and time role demands, program success, and personnel concerns subscales of the athletic directing issues scale. As hypothesized, stress was significantly related to the burnout subscales of emotional exhaustion (r=.67, p<.01), personal accomplishment (r=-.35, p<.05), and

depersonalization (r=.43, p<.01). Finally, from a stepwise multiple regression analysis (see Table 4) we suggest that hardiness and athletic directors' issues both contributed to the prediction of stress by accounting for 42% of the variance.

Table 4

Final Summary Table of Stepwise Regression Analysis Examining Predictors of Stress

	Beta	R sq	Prediction of Stress Adj R sq	R sq change
Stepwise Entry				
Step 1				
Hardiness*	-.53	.28	.27	.27
Step 2				
ADI*	.38	.42	.40	.13

Note. ADI = Athletic directors' issues total score; R sq = R square; Adj R sq = Adjusted R sq; *p < .01.

Discussion

The first purpose of the current study was to document levels of stress antecedents, stress, and burnout. The second and third purposes were to examine relationships between stress antecedents, stress, and burnout.

In regards to our first purpose, participants in this study reported a positive psycho-social group profile. For instance, athletic directors' scores on the hardiness measure we suggest represent an attitude of commitment, an internal locus of control, and a proactive view of change. The moderate correlation between hardiness and stress we interpret as to mean that individuals high in hardiness do not appraise stress as threatening as individuals lower in hardiness (Nowacki, 1991). This result is particularly optimistic because hardiness is a cognitive construct thought to be controlled by self-regulation mechanisms. In contrast, environmental stressors are traditionally thought to be less controllable.

Athletic directors were also satisfied with their social support which is considered a vital mechanism for people to deal with stress (Sarason, Levine, Basham, & Sarason, 1983; Sarason, Sarason, Shearin, & Pierce, 1987; Smith, 1986). We found mixed

support for the often cited relationship between social support and stress by finding a moderate correlation between number of social support providers and stress. Respondents with a strong social support network perceived less stress in their lives. However, social support did not contribute to the regression equation.

Finally, athletic directors' career issues were moderately correlated with stress. Athletic directors with more career-related issues tended to experience greater stress. In particular, the significant correlations between stress with the time/role demands, program success, and personnel concerns subscales should be interpreted as being particular areas of concern. Athletic directors who felt they did not have enough time, who had interpersonal concerns, and perceived little program success were likely to experience stress.

These results also support Copeland & Kirsch (1995) who reported that their limited sub-sample (n = 7) of female athletic directors rated personnel issues as almost always stressful. Their full sample (N = 108) of male and female athletic directors from division I, II, III, schools consistently reported that irrespective of division affiliation, personal relations with personnel and completing tasks on time, in addition to budget demands, maintaining a competitive program, and firing people generated the most stress (Copeland & Kirsch, 1995). Based on stepwise regression analyses, and the correlational results, both hardiness and athletic directors issues contributed to the prediction of stress, whereas social support did not.

Our hypotheses regarding the stress/burnout relationship were also supported, since stress was significantly related to all three dimensions of burnout. These results support earlier work in physical education/sport settings (Kelley & Gill, 1993, Kelley & Eklund, in press) and with athletic directors (Martin et al., in press) in which researchers found that stress predicted burnout. More specifically, stress is associated with feelings of emotional depletion and the inability to experience positive affect in work settings. Stress also is considered a reducer of emotional connection in the form of depersonalization. Finally, we suggest that the relationship between stress and personal accomplishment is such that stress may contribute to reduced feelings of satisfaction. Or alternatively, reduced feelings of satisfaction may lead to increased stress.

It is important to interpret the stress and burnout descriptive results cautiously. To reiterate, most subjects reported low stress and burnout scores, although higher scores on the emotional subscale were suggestive of burnout. These findings are similar to Martin et al. (in press) who also found that high school male athletic directors reported moderate to high levels of emotional exhaustion and, in contrast, only lower levels of depersonalization and personal accomplishment (Kelley, 1994). Thus, only a small percentage of those athletic directors participating in the current study may be experiencing burnout. However, even low to moderate levels of stress and burnout can be distressing and warrants attention (Maslach, 1982). Stress reducing strategies aimed specifically at athletic directors (Williams & Miller, 1982) and related literature (Benson, 1975; Benson & Stuart, 1993) provides useful information for athletic directors wishing to actively combat career related stress.

In summary, a number of conclusions deserve highlighting. First, the overall psycho-social group profile appears positive. Subjects reported adequate social support providers, a sense of hardiness and low to moderate levels of stress and burnout. Second, most hypotheses regarding the relationships examined were supported. These results support previous research and suggest that athletic directors who are low in hardiness, have weak social support networks, lack program success, and experience personnel concerns and time/role demands at work may be susceptible to stress. This in turn may lead to burnout, particularly in the form of emotional exhaustion. However, the correlational nature of these findings preclude establishing definitive cause and effect relationships. Finally, these results provide theoretical support for Lazarus's (1990) transactional theory of stress and Smith's (1986) cognitive-affective model of burnout. However, results should be interpreted with appropriate caution by acknowledging the limited and homogeneous sample studied. Future researchers should examine larger and more heterogeneous populations such as that conducted by Martin et al. (in press) with male athletic directors.

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